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Central Intelligence Agency

Washington D.C. 20505

DEC 1988

OCA 3912-88

The Honorable Robert S. Walker
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Walker:

Mr. Alan M. Kranowitz, Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs, forwarded a copy of your letter of October 28, 1988 to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). This letter to the President concerns the release of classified information about Nicaragua in remarks allegedly made by Speaker Wright.

As you are aware, the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence are investigating these allegations. I wish to assure you that the CIA is cooperating fully with Chairman Julian Dixon and Chairman Louis Stokes in their investigations to determine whether there were unauthorized disclosures of classified information.

This letter also is being provided to the Director of Agency Liaison, the White House.

Sincerely,

John L. Helgerson
Director of Congressional Affairs

ORIG: OCA/HA [redacted] (2 December 1988)

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Remarks

D/OCA Plans to prepare a response for DCI signature.

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ER 88-4112X

Executive Secretary

26 Oct 88

Date

3637 (10-81)

ROUTING SLIP

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From: John Helgerson

☒ We plan to prepare an
answer for your signature.

☐ We plan to prepare an
answer for my signature.

☐ No answer expected or required

☐ John, I prefer to _____

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U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Standards of Official Conduct

Suite HC-2, U.S. Capitol

Washington, DC 20515

October 24, 1988

The Honorable William Webster
Director
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D. C. 20505

Dear Mr. Webster:

On September 21, 1988, the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct was requested to investigate the circumstances of certain remarks allegedly made by Speaker Jim Wright about activities of the Central Intelligence Agency in Nicaragua.

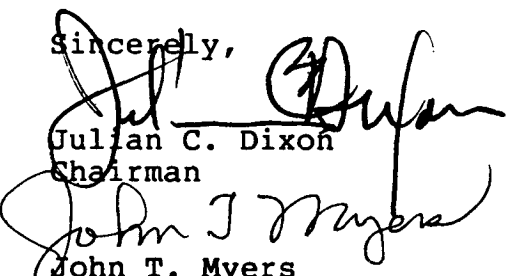
This Committee is not in a position to know whether, or to what extent, any unauthorized disclosure of intelligence or intelligence-related information may have occurred. Accordingly, this Committee requests the Central Intelligence Agency to inform us whether the Agency has provided Speaker Wright or any member of his staff with any classified information pertaining to activities of the Central Intelligence Agency organizing anti-government demonstrations that have been calculated to stimulate riots and deliberately provoke arrests and overreaction on the part of the government in Nicaragua.

If your response to the foregoing is in the affirmative, please also specify the date(s) of such disclosure(s) and precise information (be it oral or written) disclosed and whether any other individuals were present at the time of such disclosure(s).

Please address your response to the Committee in care of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,


Julian C. Dixon
Chairman


John T. Myers
Ranking Minority Member

JS:RLL

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The Washington Times

21 September 1988

Wright draws fire for spilling secrets

By Bill Gertz and Peter LaBarbera
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

House Speaker Jim Wright accused the CIA yesterday of whipping up public unrest in Nicaragua, but angry administration officials ripped into Mr. Wright for revealing information they said was based on secret briefings before congressional intelligence committees.

Administration and congressional sources confirmed that a propaganda operation in Nicaragua had been approved by both Democrats and Republicans on the House and Senate intelligence committees. They declined to comment further on the plan.

But an administration official charged that Mr. Wright had jeopardized the lives of Nicaraguan dissidents by incorrectly linking them to CIA support.

Several House Republicans threatened to file a complaint with a congressional ethics panel charging Mr. Wright with violating House rules against making secret testimony public.

Speaking at his regular morning meeting with Capitol Hill reporters, Mr. Wright said that the CIA improperly provoked the Sandinista regime into cracking down on opposition groups through a covert program aimed at sparking anti-government "riots."

"We have received clear testimony from CIA people that they have deliberately done things to provoke an overreaction on the part of the government in Nicaragua," Mr. Wright said.

Mr. Wright said that "agents of our government have assisted in organizing the kinds of anti-government demonstration that have been calculated to stimulate and provoke arrests."

Mr. Wright said CIA involvement in anti-Sandinista demonstrations was "unmistakable," and had led to a crackdown on opposition groups and a deterioration in the prospect of successful peace talks between the regime and the rebels.

He also said he had been in contact with "people in Nicaragua," presumably Sandinista leaders, who were told they must demonstrate a commitment to democratization.

The speaker condemned the U.S. operation, saying, "I do not believe it is the proper role of our government to try to provoke riots... or deliberately to try to antagonize governing officials into foolish overreactions."

"We should be using the influence of the United States to encourage the peace process, not discourage it."

An administration official, who declined to be named, blasted Mr. Wright for making "dangerously reckless charges" that a protest in Nandaime, Nicaragua, in July was the result of a CIA effort.

The official said the U.S. government was not involved in any way with the Nandaime protest. Police arrested 40 of the demonstrators at the rally.

The administration official said that Mr. Wright has placed the lives of the jailed protesters "in serious jeopardy. He's given the Sandinistas the ammunition they need to lock them up and throw away the key."

The disclosure by Mr. Wright may violate House rules that prohibit public discussion of secret testimony, according to several congressional officials who requested anonymity.

Under House rule 48, classified intelligence information can be disclosed only through a long process involving administration and legislative branch action.

That process was not pursued in the case of the CIA operation, which one source described as derived from "highly classified" House testimony. As House speaker, Mr. Wright is an ex-officio member of the Intelligence Committee.

The CIA and the National Security Council regard the leak as "very serious" and plan to pursue the disclosure with the House Intelligence Committee and the House Ethics Committee, which is responsible for enforcing House rules, a source said.

A formal complaint alleging that Mr. Wright's disclosure violated House rules is planned by Republican House members, officials said. The complaint would be given to the ethics committee.

Mr. Wright also said that, under questioning from members of Congress, CIA officials acknowledged that the agency had "sought to generate vigorous demonstrations."

Mr. Wright disclosed the operation when asked to comment on remarks he made last week during a Capitol Hill meeting with Nicaraguan resistance leaders in which he linked the CIA to the Nandaime protest.

Mr. Wright told the rebel leaders that the July 10 demonstration of opposition political parties was a "CIA provocation," according to three of the resistance leaders present at the meeting.

House Majority Whip Tony Coelho, California Democrat, and Rep. David Bonior, Michigan Democrat, were also at the meeting.

"He [Mr. Wright] said, 'The CIA was doing it to make those little devils [the Sandinistas] mad,'" said Eugenio Leal, administrator for the resistance's Washington office.

(Continued)

The Washington Times

21 September 1988

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Mr. Leal also quoted Mr. Wright as saying, with regard to the Nandaime protest, "I know well who's behind this. I know it's the CIA."

An aide to Mr. Coelho said the congressman declined to elaborate further on Mr. Wright's remarks. Mr. Bonior, an opponent of U.S. aid to the resistance, was campaigning in Michigan and unavailable for comment.

Mr. Wright told reporters yesterday that he did not know if the CIA was involved in the Nandaime protest.

But he denied telling rebel leaders at the Thursday meeting that he would not help obtain the release of the jailed demonstrators. Anybody who charged otherwise "either does not speak English or wasn't listening," he said.

Rep. Henry Hyde, Illinois Republican and the ranking minority member of intelligence panel, charged that Mr. Wright's remarks were irresponsible allegations, although he would neither confirm nor deny the existence of the operation.

"If the speaker is serious about his allegations, he is publicly accusing the House and Senate intelligence committees of falling down in their oversight responsibilities. He should have brought his charges to the committees for investigation before making such serious public charges," Mr. Hyde said.

Another House intelligence source described Mr. Wright's comments as a "highly irresponsible leak" of intelligence information that appeared timed to undermine efforts to gain congressional approval of renewed U.S. aid to the resistance.

"It is frankly shocking that the speaker would level this charge against America when all forms of freedom are being denied to the Nicaraguan people," said Rep. Jack Kemp, New York Republican. "Does the speaker also think that the riots in Armenia, the Baltic republics and Poland are also CIA-inspired?"

The House is set to take up debate on \$27 million in humanitarian assistance for the Nicaraguan rebels before adjourning next month. The Senate has approved the measure, which has provisions for the release of \$16 million in arms.

• *Glenn Garvin contributed to this report.*

The Washington Post

21 September 1988

CIA Attempted to Provoke Sandinistas, Wright Asserts

Aim Was to Erode Support, Speaker Says

By Joe Pichirallo
Washington Post Staff Writer

House Speaker Jim Wright (D-Tex.) said yesterday that "we have received clear testimony from CIA people" that the agency has attempted to provoke Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government into taking repressive measures that would undermine support for the government.

Wright, responding to a question about his private statements to Nicaraguan contra leaders last week, said he told the anti-Sandinista rebels that "I didn't think it was proper for our government to provoke a riot or antagonize officials into foolish overreactions. I said we should be encouraging the peace process, not disrupting it."

Administration officials, who declined to be identified, yesterday criticized Wright's comments, saying the speaker had jeopardized the safety of jailed opposition leaders and may have violated the confidentiality of secret congressional briefings.

Wright did not say where the "testimony" he cited on Central Intelligence Agency provocations had been given and a Wright aide later declined to identify the basis for the speaker's statement. "The statement stands by itself," the assistant said.

The speaker's statements, which came at his daily news conference, add to the continuing controversy that began with Nicaraguan allegations that U.S. Embassy officials were behind a July 10 anti-Sandinista rally that led to the arrest of about 50 opposition leaders. Security forces used tear gas and clubs to break up the demonstration.

The next day the Sandinistas expelled U.S. Ambassador Richard Melton and seven other U.S. diplomats, charging that the Reagan administration was engaged in a campaign to undermine the Nicaraguan government by abetting the internal opposition.

Melton has denied that U.S. officials were behind the July 10 demonstration and an aide to Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Chairman David L. Boren (D-Okla.) said Boren agreed with Melton.

Wright said he did not know whether U.S. officials instigated the July 10 rally, but said "we have received clear testimony from CIA people that they have deliberately done things to provoke an overreaction on the part of the government in Nicaragua."

The CIA has had the prime responsibility for managing the administration's support for the contra war effort.

But the nature of the CIA activities inside Nicaragua have never been made public.

The aide to Wright said Wright was not revealing anything new. "There were not specifics to what he said," he said. "I think he is stating the obvious."

"If it comes as a surprise that the CIA is involved in activities in Nicaragua, that does not come as a shock to me," the aide added.

David Holliday, a spokesman for the Senate intelligence committee, said yesterday that Boren has concluded there is no evidence to support Sandinista allegations that the U.S. Embassy in Nicaragua instigated the July 10 rally.

Holliday said Boren reached that conclusion after hearing closed testimony from Melton and CIA and other U.S. officials in July. Holliday said that Melton also testified at a public Senate intelligence committee hearing. Holliday said during the public hearing Boren said he was satisfied there was no U.S. involvement in the July 10 rally. Holliday said Boren's remarks were confined to "that particular rally."

The Wright aide noted that Wright's statements came in response to a question from a reporter from The Washington Times.

The reporter quoted some who attended last week's meeting as saying that Wright told the contra leaders he was in favor of cutting off all aid to the contras and that the CIA was provoking dissent in Nicaragua, including the July 10 rally. "The sources you cite either weren't present or weren't listening," Wright told the reporter.

Staff writer Don Phillips contributed to this report.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

21 September 1988

C.I.A. Tied to Nicaragua Provocations

By SUSAN F. RASKY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 20 — Jim Wright, the Speaker of the House, said today that the Central Intelligence Agency had deliberately provoked opposition activities in Nicaragua in hopes of prompting an overreaction by Nicaragua's Sandinista Government.

"We have received clear testimony from C.I.A. people that they had deliberately done things to provoke an overreaction on the part of the Government in Nicaragua," Mr. Wright, a Texas Democrat, said in response to a question at his daily news briefing.

Mr. Wright's comments today marked the first time that a Government official has publicly acknowledged such activity and explicitly stated that the C.I.A. has reported it to Congress.

The Reagan Administration has been supporting covert operations against the Sandinistas since 1981. The effort was divided between providing aid to the insurgency being waged by the contras and funneling assistance to Nicaragua's internal opposition.

The Sandinistas have also repeatedly charged that the C.I.A. has tried to destabilize the Government by fomenting opposition and based much of their internal policy on resisting the covert operations.

Seen as Public Confirmation

The Congressional committees investigating the Iran-contra affair gathered evidence that Oliver L. North, the former National Security Council aide, used money raised from the Iran arms sales to supplement the C.I.A.'s program for supporting anti-Sandinista politicians. The information was deleted from documents released by the committee because the Administration insisted it remain classified.

The Speaker says the agency deliberately incited contras.

What is unusual in today's development is that Mr. Wright seemed to be publicly confirming information given to Congress on a confidential basis.

Mr. Wright did not indicate the source of his information or the forum in which it was presented. Under current laws governing American intelligence activities abroad, the President is required to issue a special order known as a "finding" to permit various types of covert operations.

The law requires the Congressional intelligence committees to be briefed on such findings, and in certain circumstances the information can also be made available to lawmakers who do not serve on those committees. As Speaker of the House, Mr. Wright would be entitled to a briefing on C.I.A. activities in Nicaragua.

'False,' Says State Dept. Official

An Administration official said today that Mr. Wright's charges could be damaging in Nicaragua because they would "tar all of the opposition with the same brush." This official insisted that many people who oppose the Sandinistas inside Nicaragua have no relationship with American intelligence.

A State Department official asserted that Mr. Wright was giving the Sandinistas "the ammunition they need" to continue holding 39 prisoners arrested July 10 at an anti-Government demon-

stration in Nandaime, a town south of Managua.

The official said Mr. Wright was putting the prisoners under suspicion by suggesting that they might have been organized or assisted by the C.I.A.

In an interview with The Associated Press after his regular news briefing, Mr. Wright said he did not know whether the Nandaime incident was a result of C.I.A. provocations.

Talks Broken Off

Special to The New York Times

GUATEMALA, Sept. 20 — Delegations representing the Nicaraguan Government and contra guerrillas have broken off preliminary talks without agreement on conditions for a new round of high-level peace talks, but prospects for such talks still appeared alive today.

The two sides met late Monday for four hours at a Guatemala hotel. It was their first meeting since peace talks broke down June 9.

There was no breakthrough on the key question of where high-level talks should be held. Past rounds were held in Managua, and the Government wants future talks to take place there. But contra delegates were under tight restrictions while they were in Managua, and are unwilling to return.

Deputy Foreign Minister Victor Hugo Tinoco, who headed the Sandinista delegation here, suggested before returning to Nicaragua today that his Government was open to compromise.

"This may be defined in the near future," Mr. Tinoco said.

Congress is expected to vote soon on a new contra aid package, and as the vote approaches, neither the contras nor the Sandinistas want to appear intransigent.

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